

a certain figure or text is given prominence over another: Athanasius of Alexandria is mentioned repeatedly throughout the text, but his contribution to the development of Nicene orthodoxy is covered in little more than a page (190–91), while the discussion of the *Apostolic Tradition* and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* occupies more than four pages (191–96).

The volume's more original contribution lies in the "guidelines" for readers setting out to find their way in the world of early Christian literature. For instance, P. invites his audience to reflect on the gradual shift in meaning of basic terms such as "church" or "scripture" (7–9), and outlines the different causes leading to outbreaks of persecutions throughout the second and third centuries (10–14, 156–68, 177–79). The introduction includes a number of "caveats" (2) warning readers not to draw hasty conclusions from the texts they engage: "do not assume uniformity of development"; "do not assume that something is new the first time it is mentioned"; and most importantly, "do not assume that the content of early Christian documents is raw information" (2–6). Chapter 6 contains an interesting survey of the development of the New Testament canon and an outline of different stages in the development of patristic exegesis that are taken up again by tables 2 and 3 in the last section of the volume (233–35).

While some of P.'s claims are somewhat idiosyncratic—did the Antiochean School really experience such a clear-cut "reaction against allegory" (136)?—his outlines, as well as the charts and the tables that accompany the volume, will be of great use to students of this period. Similarly, in the last chapter, an agile overview of a few "ongoing themes"—such as anthropology, ecclesiology, and Christology—will help readers move with confidence from the pre-Nicene authors to the era of the great trinitarian and christological controversies of Constantinople and Chalcedon, as well as to the later syntheses of the Scholastic period.

For the foreseeable future, John Behr's *The Way to Nicaea* (2001) and the first volume of Pelikan's *The Christian Tradition* (1971) are likely to remain the most important scholarly explorations of the first centuries of the Christian era. P.'s volume, however, will provide a helpful aide-mémoire for anyone looking for an overview of this period, while also serving as a useful teaching tool for undergraduate and graduate students who are exploring the pre-Nicene era for the first time.

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REVISIONING CHRISTOLOGY: THEOLOGY IN THE REFORMED TRADITION. By Oliver D. Crisp. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. Pp. xvii + 148. \$99.95; 34.95.

"The Reformed have never seen themselves as part of a sectarian or schismatic group within the Church, but as a reforming movement within

Western catholic Christianity” (viii–ix). The “surprising diversity of views” that Crisp presents is always within “certain dogmatic constraints,” i.e., attempts to restate “for their own times the main lines of an orthodox, catholic Christology” (x). C. analyses six thinkers of the past, one from each century, to see what contribution, if any, their views can make to contemporary Christology. The chapters are not chronological but correspond to a systematic account of Christology: 1. Donald Baillie (1887–1954); 2. John Calvin (1509–1564); 3. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758); 4. William Shedd (1820–1894); 5. John Owen (1616–1683); 6. Kathryn Tanner (1954–).

C. offers a careful and balanced analysis of each author and, while critical, seeks to find what might be retrieved as a value for contemporary Christology. Normative in each case is Scripture, the orthodox tradition, and contemporary insights. There are three issues in particular, derived for the most part from the chapters on Calvin and Tanner, that have engaged this reviewer. They are (1) the incarnation as eternal, (2) the particularity of Jesus’ human experience, and (3) divine justice as necessarily retributive. Without attempting to review every author treated, these issues can give a sense of the book as a whole.

First, the chapter on Calvin proposes a “supralapsarian” thesis “as a means to interrogate Calvin’s doctrine of the motivation for the Incarnation” (25). C. avers “that this proposal is consistent with what Calvin does say,” not necessarily that this is what Calvin actually believed (35 n. 30). For Calvin, Christ as God incarnate is both “Cosmic Mediator” and “Redemptive Mediator,” i.e., as theanthropic. Both mediatorial roles depend on an eternal divine decree. Hence, God the Son is eternally God incarnate since God is atemporal. Yet the second role depends on the Son’s assumption of human nature at a particular moment in time (35–37). While recognizing tensions in Calvin’s doctrine, C. can affirm that it is consistent with the eternal divine decree that incarnation has always been first in the divine intention (supralapsarian), and that redemption is dependent on the Fall (infralapsarian). C. ends with the “theologically exotic implication” that “the human nature of God the Son preexists the creation of the world” (42 n. 19). But would this not be a natural reading of the Gospel of John?

Second, the concrete particularity of Jesus’ human experience is an issue for all the authors, but Tanner’s view of the “Incarnation as atonement” raises the issue in an acute way. “The Incarnation is the act in which God the Son assumes the human nature that is capable of absorbing sin and death at the cross” (115). Her view is not a “physical atonement doctrine” (that occurs at the “moment” of the incarnation): “Christ’s entire life culminating in his death is as much a part of the Incarnation as the moment at which the human nature of God the Son begins to exist” (118). The problem is whether God the Son assumes human nature in a generic sense—and in that sense would constitute a saving action—or whether he assumes a

particular human nature that can be salvific only through the further acts of sacrificial love on the cross. Unless Tanner is reduced to a “representationalist view of the Incarnation” (128), there must be a further specific act on the part of God the Son to effect atonement.

Finally, the third issue has to do with divine justice. Tanner’s idea of divine justice is not retributive (satisfaction or penal substitution) but restorative. Because of the strong emphasis on the seriousness of sin in the Reformed tradition (with appeals to Augustine and Anselm), C. insists that “human sin requires punishment” (129), an assertion based on Scripture and tradition, but he also recognizes that there is an appeal here to “intuitions” (or, perhaps better, to a credible and acceptable image of God). God must act “in a way consistent with his own nature” (130), but is that nature one of “wrath” or of love (1 Jn 4:8, 16)? There is a distinction that the Bible does not make, but theology does, between what God wills and what God permits. God’s positive will is always loving, life giving, and good, but God permits sin. An alternative view would be that God does not punish but does allow the consequences of our actions to have their effect, and this is interpreted biblically as “wrath.”

I highly recommend C.’s work for its incisive analysis of important thinkers in the Reformed tradition and attendant theological subtleties.

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THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THE POWER OF GOD. By Atle Ottesen Sjøvik. *Studies in Systematic Theology*. Boston: Brill, 2011. Pp. vii + 272. \$151.

Why did God part the Red Sea but not stop the recent tsunamis? The dilemma behind this question is the subject of Sjøvik’s revised dissertation: how to reconcile the presence of evil with the existence of an all-good and omnipotent God (119–21). S. explores this vexing topic through a charitable yet searching examination of two contemporary philosophical theologians (Richard Swinburne and Keith Ward), a process theologian (David Griffin), and a Lutheran theologian (Johan Hygen). Although primarily a work of philosophical theology, it draws significantly on the ideas of Wolfhart Pannenberg and creatively discusses issues in systematic theology.

S. excludes those approaches that avoid the problem by, for example, simply asserting the inscrutability of Providence or positing an impersonal God. Although S. values practical responses to the problem of evil, he nonetheless insists that one must still tackle the theoretical question of why a good God would create a world with the possibility of suffering and then permit so much of it to take place. No evasion of the demands of plausibility and coherence here.